

What We Heard

Summary of Public and Indigenous Comments on the Detailed Impact Assessment for the Trans-Canada Highway Twinning - Phase IVB, Yoho National Park

Context

Parks Canada Agency (PCA) is responsible for managing the land and the resources within Canada's national parks, historic sites and marine conservation areas. That responsibility includes the management and protection of natural and cultural resources including highways and roads located on these lands as well as the promotion of environmental stewardship.

PCA is proposing to twin (four lane) a 40 km portion of the Trans-Canada Highway (TCH) from the end of the existing 4-lane section near Sherbrooke Creek to the western border of Yoho National Park (YNP) (the Project). The TCH in this location is currently a two-lane rural arterial undivided highway. Once completed, the Project will operate as a four-lane rural arterial divided highway separated by a grassed median or a raised concrete barrier. The TCH is Canada's main east-west transportation corridor, serving as the most important commercial trade corridor between western Canada and the rest of the country. The TCH is also a major route facilitating the use of the mountain parks with around 5 million visitors each year. Twinning of the TCH will upgrade the capacity and safety of the roadway to accommodate increased traffic, help to maintain ecological integrity in the park by reducing wildlife and traffic conflicts and maximize motorist safety, and improve the reliability of movement through the park.

Parks Canada is recognized as a world leader in highway-related environmental protection measures and highway mitigation research. The Project will continue to set a high standard for environmental mitigation measures including wildlife excursion fencing, underpasses and overpasses to facilitate crossings by different species and maintain connectivity along major wildlife corridors.

Consultation with Indigenous groups, the public and stakeholders on the draft Detailed Impact Assessment (DIA) helped inform the final determination on whether the anticipated impacts can be mitigated and if the Project can proceed.

Parks Canada reviewed all comments received during the public consultation process for the DIA. The majority of comments received were related to the Project, and did not specifically reference or relate to the DIA. These broader concerns about elements of the Project will help to inform future decisions. No changes are required to the DIA based on the comments received.

Public Consultation Process

In 2016, Parks Canada announced the beginning of formal public consultations on the Project. A public and Indigenous participation plan was developed to engage the public, stakeholders and Indigenous groups and provide opportunities for interested parties to share comments and feedback. In this first phase of consultations, Parks Canada engaged early with key stakeholders, local residents, neighbouring municipalities and Indigenous groups.

From 2016 to 2017, a series of one on one meetings were undertaken with key stakeholders and a public open house was held in Field, BC to share information about the Project and

preliminary highway design, and to seek public feedback. Key stakeholders were also notified of the Terms of Reference prepared for the DIA, which was made available for review on request.

A four-week public comment period for the draft DIA took place from January 27 – February 28, 2020. Public notices describing the process and inviting the public to participate were placed in local newspapers. Invitations to comment were also extended to the public through the Yoho National Park social media channels. A public notice about the Project was posted on the Government of Canada's *Consulting with Canadians* website, and additional information and opportunity to comment on the draft Detailed Impact Assessment was featured on the Yoho National Park website to increase reach to interested Canadians. Information packages were sent to core stakeholders and local municipalities (Town of Golden and Columbia Shuswap Regional District Area A), inviting feedback on the Project. The option of requesting an in-person meeting for further discussion was identified in the information packages. Public open houses were held in both Field and Golden, BC for opportunity to engage and provide feedback on the Project.

Indigenous Participation

Concurrent to public engagement activities, Indigenous groups were notified in 2016 of the Project, specifically regarding the development of the DIA and design for Phase IVB and the opportunity to provide input to help shape these documents. PCA entered into consultation protocol agreements and associated capacity funding agreements with the Ktunaxa Nation Council (representing the four Ktunaxa Nation bands) and the Shuswap Band (serving as lead community on behalf of five Secwépemc Nation bands including Splotsin, Neskonlith Indian Band, Adams Lake Indian Band and Little Shuswap Lake Band), respectively, to support participation in the impact assessment process, field assessments and consultations on the Project.

Ktunaxa Nation and Shuswap Band each undertook independent assessments of the Project, reflecting their interests and potential adverse impacts of the Project, and proposed mitigation strategies from their respective perspectives. The assessments also identified several broader, park-level concerns, beyond the scope of the Project.

Review of the independent assessments led to the identification of the following major themes related to the Project:

- Asserted Indigenous rights, title and stewardship responsibilities;
- Ongoing involvement in planning, management and implementation;
- Protection of and access to natural and cultural resources;
- Traditional knowledge, culture and language; and
- Economic opportunities.

The Indigenous assessments acknowledged the wide-ranging benefits of national park protection but expressed concern that the Project represents increased displacement and restricted use of a large area of land and resources within Ktunaxa and Secwépemc traditional territories. There was acknowledgment that the DIA addresses some of their concerns but that

several potential impacts must be addressed by proposed mitigation strategies before their interests in the Project would be met.

Ktunaxa Nation and the Secwepemc bands identify themselves as holders of Indigenous rights, title and stewardship responsibilities in Yoho National Park, including the Project area, and have voiced the need for a mutually acceptable, collaborative process for ongoing planning, managing and implementation of activities associated with the Project.

The Indigenous assessments indicated that the Project has the potential to interfere with the protection of, and access to, cultural heritage and natural resources that Ktunaxa and Secwepemc peoples care for and rely on, and identified the need for a collaborative process for protecting and managing natural and cultural resources. The Indigenous assessments also noted that restoring access for cultural practices and enhanced collaboration on resource management within Yoho National Park could support reconciliation between Parks Canada and Ktunaxa Nation and the Secwepemc bands, respectively.

The Indigenous assessments indicated that the Project could further adversely impact Indigenous values related to culture, archaeology, traditional knowledge and language, and proposed that incorporation of cultural practices and traditional knowledge into the Project would be an integral step towards acknowledging the impacts of the Project, as well as establishing a respectful and meaningful process that protects culturally valued resources.

The Indigenous assessments called attention to the potential for short and long-term employment, training, procurement, and other economic opportunities related to the Project, and suggested that employment of Ktunaxa and Secwepemc citizens would not only improve economic outcomes for Ktunaxa and Secwepemc peoples, but could also support the restoration of Indigenous stewardship responsibilities in Yoho National Park.

In general, the Indigenous assessments indicated the potential risk of adverse impacts on all of the above mentioned themes. To address these potential impacts, Parks Canada agreed to establish a Joint Advisory Committee with Ktunaxa Nation and Shuswap Band that will serve as a forum to provide advice to the Field Unit Superintendent throughout the lifetime of the Project for joint planning, management and implementation of proposed mitigation measures in their respective assessments. Both Ktunaxa Nation and Shuswap Band agreed that with the establishment of this Committee and implementation of proposed mitigation measures, adverse impacts could largely be avoided.

Public Participation

Parks Canada hosted two open houses in February, one in Field and one in Golden. Approximately 40 people attended open houses and hand written comments were submitted by some attendees. Members of the public also provided comments via e-mail or by answering a short online survey on the Yoho National Park website.

Respondents were asked the following questions:

- Which aspects of the Project do you support and why?
- Which aspects of the Project do you have concerns about and why?
- Is there something we missed that we should be considering? If so, please describe.

- Any additional comments or questions?

By the end of the public consultation period, Parks Canada received 62 feedback responses from the public, of which:

- 49 were online feedback forms,
- 8 were handwritten submissions at open houses, and
- 5 were e-mails.

All comments have been reviewed by Parks Canada. A few were excluded when it was evident that they were in reference to the Kicking Horse Canyon Phase 4 Project which falls under the jurisdiction of the Province of British Columbia. The majority of comments received were related to the Project, and did not specifically reference or relate to the DIA.

After reviewing the comments, several themes were identified that suggested particular areas of common concern. A summary of the comments and these themes is provided below.

Overall, the project was positively received by the public based on the improved motorist safety and increased wildlife protection. Many respondents felt that the Project was overdue, and some respondents requested additional information on how to assist with funding approval.

The following is a summary of the major themes identified in the comments received:

Environment

A large number of comments expressed the importance of environmental consideration in the Project. They understood the need of twinning the TCH and expressed appreciation for the attention and effort by Parks Canada to ensuring wildlife and environmental protections would be put in place.

Respondents expressed appreciation for wildlife mitigations (fencing and wildlife over- and underpasses) similar to previously twinned highway sections in Banff and Yoho, and the safety benefits for the travelling public.

A few comments suggested that Parks Canada should consider rehabilitating former secondary roads in the Park to offer non-motorized vehicle access and reaffirmed the importance of preserving cultural heritage sites.

Visitor Experience

Many respondents expressed concerns regarding Parks Canada proposals for Day Use Areas (DUA) within the Project area. The closure of Finn Creek DUA received the highest number of negative comments. According to comments, this area has been a picnic destination for local families for generations and it was felt that the area has seen increased use by visitors as a result of high visitation at more popular DUAs, like Takakkaw Falls and Emerald Lake. Nearby Faeder Lake DUA provides a comparable visitor experience to Finn Creek DUA. Faeder Lake DUA will be improved to accommodate increased visitor use following the closure of Finn Creek DUA.

Another topic that received several negative comments was the relocation of the Mount Hunter trailhead. The Mount Hunter trail is a popular hike being relatively close to Golden; a relatively short hike that quickly gains elevation to an open ridge and is typically one of the first hikes in Yoho to be accessible in the spring. The proposed relocation would add a considerable section of trail through forested terrain. The comments received, despite understanding the rationale for the relocation, asked Parks Canada to reconsider this decision or to find a viable alternative. On consideration of the comments and the plan, Parks Canada will continue assessing plans and options for the proposed relocation to improve hiker safety and eliminate risk to visitors associated with Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and the TCH.

The relocation of the Burgess Pass trailhead closer to the Visitor Centre in Field was well received.

Roadway design and safety

Overall, comments recognized safety improvements offered by the Project and were supportive of the decision to use the depressed median cross-sectional arrangement as much as possible, understanding that the terrain limits the use of a wider cross section through more mountainous segments. Some respondents expressed safety concerns at major intersections, particularly the Emerald Lake Road. Similar comments expressed at open houses were addressed directly and the improvements of the proposed design were explained.

There were a number of negative comments about the installation of a traffic light at Field intersection. Reasons for this varied from a perception of reduced safety, to the possible creation of long traffic queues on the TCH, to a general feeling that traffic signals are uncommon occurrences on rural sections of the TCH across Canada. Several comments in opposition to the traffic light at Field appeared to be based on the premise that the light was intended to accommodate pedestrian crossings. The main objective of the Field traffic signals will be to improve motorist safety, with pedestrian safety being a secondary benefit.

The Field intersection was operating in a way that created safety concerns. The intersection had traffic lights installed in 2020, providing the opportunity to assess the new lights' performance in advance of twinning.

Comments on the traffic signal project also suggested alternative options observed in other locations, such as a grade separated intersection, a protected "tee" with raised concrete curb, and a pedestrian underpass to connect the Yoho Visitor Centre to the proposed Burgess Pass Trailhead. Parks Canada notes that all options were considered by the transportation engineering team and eliminated based on terrain maintenance, financial, and traffic considerations.

Winter maintenance

A few open house attendees commented on the status of highway snow clearing and maintenance during the winter. It was noted that despite plowing the highway, snow accumulations often reduced the twinned section of the TCH at the eastern end of Yoho (km 82-88) to one lane per direction, which eliminated the benefits of twinning. The maintenance and operation of through highways is performed by the Parks Canada Highway Operations Unit. This includes the Trans-Canada Highway, Highway 16 and Highway 93 South and North. These highways represent significant winter maintenance challenges given the terrain, topography, avalanche risk and climatic conditions. Parks Canada follows comprehensive guidelines that

prescribe response times and maintenance requirements based on the classification of the road.

Other respondents reminded Parks Canada of the importance of building avalanche mitigation infrastructure to reduce closures on an important highway and transportation route for Canada's economy. Remote Avalanche Control Systems (RACS) were installed on both Mount Bosworth (in 2018) and Mount Stephen (in 2019) through approved Basic Impact Assessments to improve winter road safety and reduce road closures on the TCH. Monitoring, periodic maintenance and improvement activities continue to occur at the existing avalanche protection berm located at the base of Mount Stephen. Additional engineered debris control systems will be identified and developed during the detailed design phase of the Project.